

National Report on Sustainable Forests—2003

USDA - Forest Service

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Presentation

- ✦ Background on the report
- ✦ Findings...including what can we say about the sustainability of the nation's forests?
- ✦ Challenges and next steps

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U.S. Government Commitment

- ✦ 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
- ✦ 1993 Presidential Decision Directive
- ✦ 1995 Santiago Declaration
- ✦ 1996 President's Council on Sustainable Development
- ✦ 1996 Seventh American Forest Congress
- ✦ 1998 Roundtable on Sustainable Forests
- ✦ 2000 Federal Memorandum of Understanding on Sustainable Forest Management Data
- ✦ 2004 National Report on Sustainable Forests—2003

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Why a report in 2003?

✦ International track

- Montreal Process – 10th meeting of Working Group (Moscow, October 9, 1998)

"The Working Group also agreed to prepare a Montreal Process report on data collected by countries against the Montreal Process indicators for publication in the year 2003."

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Why a report in 2003?

✦ Domestic track

- Resources Planning Act (RPA) authorizes a periodic assessment

- Stakeholder letter to CEQ (March 11, 1998)

"It makes logical sense for the Forest Service to compile and report on the status and trends of all the forest resources of the country."

- Roundtable on Sustainable Forests – Action Plan for the Technical Work Group (September 30, 1999)

"The long-term goals of the Roundtable: ... help guide the development of a national report on sustainable forest management by 2003 and the next World Forestry Congress."

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Report format

✦ Report has 5 sections

- Introduction
- Analyses of the indicators
- Summarizing and interpreting the information
- Examples of current actions
- Transition towards sustainability

✦ Second section – 67 one-page summaries of indicators

- One or two graphics
- What is the indicator and why is it important?
- What does the indicator show?

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Availability of Report

- ✳ Electronic version of report and supporting technical documents are available:

www.fs.fed.us/research/sustain

- ✳ Compact disks with National Report and data report available on request

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Findings ...

✳ On the one hand:

- For about 100 years there has been "no net loss" of forest (in aggregate)
- Net growth exceeds removals by 47%
- Wood fiber is used more efficiently, including recycling
- Private land supplies the majority of timber harvested
- Frequency distribution of tree sizes has shifted toward larger trees
- Most forest area has low soil erosion potential

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Findings ...

✳ On the other hand:

- Increasing recreation demand intersects with decreasing area available for free use
- Per capita consumption of wood/paper has increased
- Mortality has increased (but is still below ¾ of one percent)
- Past decade has seen more frequent above-average fire seasons
- Fragmentation is real (but hard to interpret)

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Serious forest health concerns ...

✳ Concerns exist today in many locales about forest health, condition, and productivity

- Many forests have high fuel levels that are compromising human safety and ecosystem health
- Every region of the U.S. has major problems with invasive species

✳ Report does not contain "hot spot" analyses identifying localities with severe problems

- Public interest in "hot spot" analyses suggests that these need to be built into future national reports
- Building a data base on forest health, condition, and productivity that allows moving across geographic scales from local to regional to national conditions will be challenging

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The available information ...

✳ Criteria and indicators adopted for this report do not include all the key driving forces affecting the nation's forests

- Examples of omissions: population growth rates, per-capita income, and import/export balances

✳ Data gaps exist for some indicators at the national scale

- For some indicators, measurement protocols and monitoring programs do not exist
- Reference conditions are unavailable for some indicators
- Relative values among indicators remain unclear

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A broad national perspective ...

✳ Report summarizes information at the national scale across all ownerships

- Situations differ widely among different landowners
- Report focuses on the means, not the variances

✳ For a few indicators, data are available at the regional scale or for specific ownership categories

- East versus West for forest cover types, for example
- Net growth by ownership group, for example

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What can we say about the sustainability of the nation's forests?

- ✦ We've learned what we know and what we don't know
 - Much is known about some indicators
 - Data are unavailable and gaps exist for other indicators
 - Relative values among indicators are poorly understood
- ✦ Report provides a firm foundation for future efforts
 - Indicators are a common language for dialogue
 - Report provides a common base for shared learning
 - Report establishes a baseline for judging future progress

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What are the Challenges to Assessing the Sustainability of America's Forests?

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Challenges ...

- ✦ American public is interested in forest sustainability at multiple scales
 - A national report inevitably obscures the importance of extreme conditions existing in some localities
 - Data bases and indicator analyses are needed that enable analyses to move across scales from local to national so that both national trends and local/regional "hotspots" are fully displayed

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Challenges ...

- ✦ Mosaic of forests in the U.S. is managed by owners with diverse objectives, operating within a complex framework of federal, state, and local laws and regulations, private property rights, and public land management policies
 - Understanding the linkages among these factors and their aggregate impact is critical to understanding sustainability

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Challenges ...

- ✦ Current information for all 67 indicators and a values-based dialogue about the whole set of indicators are needed to make a definitive statement about sustainability (as defined by the Montreal Process)
 - Data for 11 indicators are incomplete
 - Data for 9 indicators were modeled
 - For other indicators, data were more than 5 years old; in some cases much older

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Challenges ...

- ✦ Sustainable forest management is a highly integrated and interdependent concept that is incompletely understood
 - The environmental, economic, and social spheres exert joint, simultaneous, and inextricable influences on forests
 - We do not fully understand how forests function within the environmental sphere nor how the 3 interlinked spheres interact
 - More systems thinking is needed to understand the structure and functioning of these 3 interlinked systems

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Challenges ...

- ✳ Many initiatives to influence sustainability have been undertaken at the local level and at other scales, yet success stories have not been widely shared

- Need to find ways to share what has been experienced and learned
- Shared learning will lead to:
 - Better instruments to foster sustainable forest management
 - Faster learning
 - Helping shape future innovation and change

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Challenges ...

- ✳ Lack of regular, periodic monitoring programs for *all* indicators has hindered preparation of the report; and it will hinder public dialogue about sustainability in the coming years

- Improving existing inventory and monitoring programs by expanding their coverage, assigning responsibility, and providing funding necessary to implement them is essential if existing data gaps are to be eliminated in future sustainability reports

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How does U.S. report compare to reports from other Montreal Process countries?

- ✳ World Forestry Congress (September 2003)
 - Country reports from Australia, Mexico, Russia, Uruguay were shared
 - U.S. released indicator summaries and supporting technical documents of country report
 - U.S. contributed to overview report for all Montreal Process countries
- ✳ Much the same vis-a-vis data availability and data gaps
 - All countries are interested in shared learning
 - All remain committed to improving over time
 - See Montreal Process web site for details: www.mpci.org

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Next Steps Beyond the Report

- ✳ Reviewing and revising the criteria & indicators to improve future reports
 - Iterative process through top/down (international, national) and bottom/up (regional, state, local) activities
- ✳ Improving national, regional, state, and local level information
 - Examples: Non-timber forest products, fragmentation, community indicators, definitions
- ✳ Fostering sustainable forest management on-the-ground
 - Dialogue and action

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Better data... Better dialogue... Better decisions...

- ✳ Discerning meaning depends on:
 - Where you are...different places have different conditions and realities
 - Who you are...different people and cultures have different world views-
 - What you are...different professions have different understandings and different organizations have different missions that influence perspectives
- ✳ Roundtable on Sustainable Forests
 - Work Groups - Communications & Outreach; and Technical
 - Opportunities - Both national and regional activities

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